



Helping Communities face the challenges and impacts of growth while maintaining their character and sense of place.

Site Plan Review

The Basics of Site Plan Review

A site plan review may be required for expanding or new non-residential uses or multi-family units with greater than two dwellings. The physical constraints of the land, soils, wetlands, easements, and setbacks determine the intensity of use permitted and are dealt with in the subdivision (lot creation) process. Therefore, subdivision regulations are a prerequisite (see text box to right). The physical appearance of the land and building, orientation of buildings, parking, access management, traffic impact, placement of utilities, fire protection, signs, lighting, and landscaping all impact the functionality and appearance of the "site." For planning boards, a typical "site" plan may follow these basic steps:

1. Lot created or selected/use proposed
2. Conceptual discussion (regulatory issues)
3. Public hearing process begins - legal notices
4. Design review prior to full engineered plans
5. Sufficiently completed application submitted
6. Variances, exceptions, waivers addressed
7. Complete application approval considered
8. Design review of application begins
9. Site walk, reports, testimony weighed
10. Design, legal documents, bond finalized
11. All approvals granted or pending
12. Conditional approval considered
13. All permits secured, conditions met
14. Appeals periods have expired
15. Site plan signed, recorded and/or filed

Beyond the Basics...

RSA 674:43, III provides for an alternative authority to conduct site plan review. If authorized by the legislative body (Town Meeting ballot), planning boards may delegate authority for review of minor site plans to a committee of qualified residents.

Under RSA 674:43, IV the legislative body or planning board may establish thresholds for when site plan review is required, based on the size of the development or parcel.

RSA 674:44, V permits the planning board to require the applicant to pay all fees for legal notifications; reasonable fees for administrative costs; and costs of relevant studies, special investigations, and document review.

NEW HAMPSHIRE ENABLING STATUTES

Title LXIV Planning and Zoning includes Chapter 674, Local Land Use Planning and Regulatory Powers. The following relate to site plans review.

RSA 674:43, Power to review Site Plans –

I. A municipality, having adopted a zoning ordinance as provided in RSA 674:16, and where the planning board has adopted subdivision regulations as provided in RSA 674:36, may by ordinance or resolution further authorize the planning board to require preliminary review of site plans and to review and approve or disapprove site plans for the development or change or expansion of use of tracts for nonresidential uses or for multi-family dwelling units, which are defined as any structures containing more than 2 dwelling units, whether or not such development includes a subdivision or resubdivision of the site. ...*(See complete text)*

RSA 674:44, Site Plan Review Regulations –

I. Before the planning board exercises its powers under RSA 674:43, it shall adopt site plan review regulations according to the procedures required by RSA 675:6.
 II. The site plan review regulations which the planning board adopts may:
 (a) Provide for the safe and attractive development or change or expansion of use of the site and guard against such conditions as would involve danger or injury to health, safety, or prosperity...

This section goes on to specify the site plan review regulations the planning board may adopt; stipulate requirements for installation of streets and utilities; allow the board to require a bond for unfinished work and; require the applicant to pay reasonable costs.

Source: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/nhtoc.htm>

iTRaC is the Nashua Regional Planning Commission's new approach to community planning that focuses on integrating transportation, land use and environmental planning. The program was developed to assist communities in dealing with the challenges of growth in a coordinated way that sustains community character and a sense of place.



Nashua Regional
Planning Commission

9 Executive Park Dr.
Suite 201
Merrimack, NH 03054

Phone: (603) 424-2240
Fax: (603) 424-2230
www.nashuarpc.org

Updated April 2009

Site Plan Review: Resources, Tools & Tips

Training seminars and workshops on subdivision and site plan review are available annually. In spring and fall the NH Office of Energy and Planning offers a planning conference. In September/October the NH Municipal Association presents a Law Lecture Series. Many of the RPCs, including NRPC, offer free workshops throughout the year. Training workshops are also offered annually by NHDES, typically on environmental topics affecting site plan review.

RESOURCES: Where to find answers and information

- NH State Statutes
<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rso/html/nhtoc.htm>
- NH Office of Energy and Planning
<http://www.nh.gov/oep/resourcelibrary/HandbooksAndOtherPublications.htm>
- NH Department of Environmental Services
<http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/categories/publications.htm>
- Fundamentals of Plan Review-NRPC
http://www.nashuarpc.org/envplanning/documents/links/Fundamentals_Plan_Review.pdf
- Subdivision and Site Plan Review Handbook-SWRPC
http://www.swrpc.org/library/local_planning/Subdivision%20and%20Site%20Plan%20Review%20Handbook.pdf

TOOLS: Ways to improve quality and consistency

- What Information Is Required From An Applicant For Site Plan Review - Maine Site Plan Handbook
<http://www.state.me.us/spo/landuse/docs/siteplanhandbook/siteplansect6.pdf>
- Create checklists of local requirements, standard plan notes & approvals, and error & omissions statements
- Create an approval checklist with standard conditions of approval, appeals deadlines, list of standard & specific legal documents, and permits required
- Adopt Design Guidelines, Access Management, Stormwater, Lighting, and Bonding regulations
- Encourage site walks with plans to better relate what is on the ground to what is on paper. Colorize plan details.

TIPS: Things to consider when reviewing site plans

Every new plan or revision needs to be reviewed carefully. It is easy to begin looking for one thing, then see something else and switch attention to that. Staying organized and developing a systematic process for site plan review can make things easier. Try to stay on track to avoid missing things during a review. A “big picture” first pass can help. The following tips may also help:

- Verify ownership - legal deed
- Require signed authorization to represent the owner
- Did all abutters get notice? (include Town/all professionals)
- Is site subject to Shoreland or Drinking Water Protection?
- Within 1/4 mile of river - the LRAC is notified for comments
- Remember Overlay District restrictions and setbacks
- Do regulations permit Low Impact Development (LID)?

- Allow for State permits applied for after design is set to avoid amendments and cost
- Road profiles/grading plans?
- State curb cut required? How will their permit affect plan?
- Require lowest floor above SHWT or 100-Yr. Flood Zone?
- Check sight distances/grades
- Trash hauled out of town?
- Bury utilities - full cut-off lights
- Signs designed for speed limit
- Where will snow be stored?

- Grease or oil/silt traps for building or catch basins?
- Proper filter material & depth for porous pavement/cement?
- Delivery & trash pick up locations & access adequate?
- Preconstruction meeting before any work - adjust bond amount
- Limit excavation to incidental?
- Dept. review form may help
- Get CEO ruling before hearing
- Are state and local codes met?
- Inspect? / As-built? / Record?

For more details on this topic or an overview of the entire iTRaC program, visit www.nashuarpc.org/itrac or contact Camille Pattison, iTRaC Program Manager, at camillep@nashuarpc.org or 603-424-2240 x14.

